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❖THE❖OLD❖TESTAMENT❖STUDENT.❖

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THE study of the Bible should be an important element in the curriculum of the theological seminary. It is perhaps not too much to say that it should be *the* study in such institutions. But what are the facts in the case? Is there given to Bible-study, in the proper sense of that term, a sufficient amount of time in which to accomplish the work which ought to be done? Is the time that is given to it employed in a manner likely to produce the best results? Is there in our schools of the prophets an interest in the Bible, an enthusiasm for its study, an eagerness to know its contents? Do the students who take the theological course of study go forth to their fields of labor well stocked with real Bible-knowledge, and well skilled in the best methods of handling it? There can be no doubt as to what answer these questions ought to have; but is there reason to suppose that, as applied to a majority of the theological seminaries in this country, they will receive such answer?

IN SOME institutions of sacred learning (the statement is made guardedly) Bible-study is a farce; in too many it is sadly neglected. In very few, does the work performed at all correspond to the vital relation which, it is generally believed, a true conception of the Bible events and precepts sustains to the efficient accomplishment of the minister's work. This is felt to some extent by instructors in these institutions; to some extent also by the men who study in them; but much more keenly, by those who have passed through the course of study, and, having reached their fields of labor, find themselves but poorly equipped for their work. The ignorance of the Bible which characterizes the average seminary graduate is amazing. Nor does *he* realize it until he stands in the very midst of the conflict for which a proper knowledge of the Book would have armed him.

IS IT not a *mistake*, even in those seminaries whose students have had the best preliminary training, to do no work in the English Bible? We need have little fear that our ministers shall ever have too intimate an acquaintance with the original languages of Scripture. Too much cannot be said or done to encourage and to require such study. Yet we must not create the impression that the English Bible is no longer worthy of their study. There are kinds of work which can be done *only* upon the basis of the original languages. But there are other kinds of Bible-study which can be done fully as well, and in some respects better, with *only* the English translation. It is possible to lead a student to feel that nothing of value can be gained from the Bible except directly from the original tongues. But the student who possesses himself of this idea and then fails to obtain any satisfactory knowledge of the original languages, is not only without that knowledge which would enable him to get along independently of study in the English Bible, but also without that respect for the English Bible which he needs to make work in it attractive. Not a whit less work should be done in the effort to master the original languages; but all the while this is being done, and even after fair attainments in this line have been made, let the student study the English Bible, not merely for devotional purposes,—this he must do at any rate,—but in the classroom; let it be used as a text-book and let it become to him a living thing. Were our students given more instruction *in* the Bible, and perhaps less *about* it, the results would be far more satisfactory. Language-drill, by which even at best in large classes perhaps only one-half are really profited, is a poor substitute for Bible-study. This instruction is invaluable, if thorough, but let not those who give it, or those who receive it, think for a moment that it is all that is needed.

IS NOT a *mistake* made in many seminaries in the employment of the time allotted to Bible-study? In our remarks we have special reference to the Old Testament. Let us take three cases: (1) In one seminary, the students, during the first fifteen weeks of a thirty-week year, are driven rapidly over the principles of the language. If the class is large, probably one-half (certainly no greater portion) do fairly the work assigned. After this preliminary drill, the class proceeds at once to exegesis (so-called). During the remaining fifteen weeks of the first year, and the scattered hours of the other years, those of the class who chance to be present listen to the exegesis dictated by the professor. This, for the most part, is the discussion of nice distinctions which the class is in no sense prepared to appreciate. The good professor often chooses those most difficult portions which neither he

nor any who have lived before him have had the ability to elucidate. The student does not learn any thing, nor how to do any thing. It is distasteful to him. Already, at the end of the second year, he has forgotten in large measure the small amount of information gained concerning the language. At the end of the third year, he sells his Hebrew books, for they are of no further service to him. This describes the cases of hundreds of men, from many different theological seminaries. There *must* be a mistake in this method.

(2) A second case is similar to the first ; but it differs in this respect, that the fifteen weeks given in the first instance to linguistic instruction, hurried it is true, yet upon the whole thorough, is, in this case, given to a work which is *called* teaching and study, but in which there is not the faintest trace of honest labor. It is when such work is done, that we say Bible-study is a *farce*. This is an extreme case, but nevertheless a true one. In institutions where such so-called work is done, there are well-established traditions that men have passed good written examinations in Hebrew exegesis, who could not write, except to copy, a single Hebrew word.

(3) A third case is better ; here the instructor, believing that the basis for all true exegetical work lies in a knowledge of the original, and feeling that the student who has this knowledge can for himself do that which is more strictly called Bible-study, occupies all or nearly all of the student's time in purely linguistic work. Whatever else is done, the class learns the grammar, the syntax, a vocabulary, the most important synonyms. They read now very critically ; now quite rapidly ; now again, extemporaneously. Careful attention is given to the translating of English into Hebrew, to the philosophy of the structure of the language, to the nicer points of syntax, to the derivation of words, to the renderings of the various ancient versions, to textual criticism. Can any objection be made to such work ? Should any part of this be neglected ? Surely not. Yet is it practical Bible-study ? The professor delivers a few lectures on Hebrew poetry, on the age of manuscripts, on the value of the versions in interpretation, and in textual work. And with *only* this knowledge, so far as the Old Testament is concerned, the student goes forth to the great work of saving souls and building up believers in Christ.

There is here and there a teacher who is able to do thorough linguistic work, and yet find time to teach his students something of the Bible. But, if the testimony of those who have been students is to be received, if the feeling of many who are now students is to be trusted, there is, in too many cases, a *mistake* made in the employment of the time, meager as it is, which is allotted to the Bible-department.

Is it not a *mistake* to fail, for whatever reason, to give definite and detailed instruction in those important departments of Bible-study which take up the very Bible itself? The study of Bible History is not a study *concerning* the Bible, but *of* the Bible. The Bible is full of history. The study of this history is, in the strictest sense, Bible-study. Yet, in many institutions this work is entirely omitted, it being thought wiser to occupy the time of the student in a careful and exhaustive study of all the schisms and heresies of the early church. The Old Testament is made up largely of *prophecy*; the New Testament is, indeed, largely the fulfillment of this prophecy. Yet not one student in twenty leaves the seminary with even a respectable knowledge of the facts of prophecy or the principles which regulate these facts; while in the mind of the ordinary minister, there is a dimness and a haziness about this subject which renders it, in their estimation, a far-away thing, and unapproachable. The same, in substance, may be said of other departments. How many students have considered those questions which a Bible-interpreter must ask and must answer concerning the age, authorship, general purpose and particular teachings of even a few of the more important books of the Bible? If the Bible *is* the minister's hand-book, why is he not taught to handle it?

IT WILL be said that these statements are overdrawn; that this presentation is an exaggerated one; that, although as much as may be desired is not accomplished, the failure is due to the very nature of the case, and not to any thing that can be remedied. We cannot, however, accept this. *Facts* cannot be disputed. It is not a question, What do our seminaries claim to do? but rather, What are they doing? With what Bible-equipment do our young men enter upon their work? Even those seminaries to which these words do not apply (and it is a matter for congratulation that there are such) can do more than has been done in the past. There need be no fear either that too much attention will be paid to the Bible, or that work in this line will crowd out other necessary theological work. The other departments are, it is conceded, based upon the Bible-departments. It is scarcely possible that too deep or too broad a foundation can be laid.

In a following number of THE STUDENT other features of this question will be considered.